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When I joined the department our computing facilities were some flexowriters for producing 7-track paper tape containing Algol-60 programs. These programs were put into cardboard boxes which we took to the Institute of Computer Science in Gordon Square to be run on the ICT Atlas 1 computer that took up the whole of the basement. Some hours later we would collect our boxes together with the output from running the program on lineprinter paper.

As minicomputers became more readily available, the department purchased a DEC PDP-15/20 with 8 KB of memory (18-bit words) and two DECTapes, each containing 184 KB of data. One DECTape drive was used for the system utilities (editor, assembler, loader) and the other was used for staff/student programs. A booking system was used to share the load as the machine was single-user.

During this time the first microcomputers were coming on the scene and we had a room of boxes (yes, real wood) each with a monitor and shared printer running CP/M. Again, a booking system was needed.

David Cairns and I looked around for an upgrade to the PDP-15/20. The best choice was a DEC PDP-15/76. This consisted of our original PDP-15/20 and an add-on box called a Unichannel-15, which actually consisted of a DEC PDP-11/05 processor and two RK05 disc drives, each holding 2.4 MB of formatted data. Communication between the two machines consisted of a 16-bit data channel.

The Unichannel-15 was still in, what we would say now, beta so David and I helped DEC develop and stabilise their code. As you can imagine, it was fun and games moving 18-bit data (PDP-15) to and from the PDP-11, which had a 16-bit architecture. It was still a single-user system, but the increased (and faster) storage was useful.

More PCs came into the department, together with our first time-sharing equipment, some teletypes and phone lines using acoustic modems to connect with "service providers". The PDP-15 was being used less and less.

Around Easter 1979 I saw an article about an operating system called Mini-Unix that could support multiple users on a PDP-11/05! So I wrote to Dennis Ritchie, enclosing an RK05 disk, who returned it containing the complete operating system. We disconnected the PDP-11/05 from the ancient PDP-15/20 and had Mini-Unix up and running with a teletype as console.

I persuaded Peter King to purchase a terminal interface, and this started our multi-user Unix experience. We upgraded the PDP-11/05 to a PDP-11/34 in order to run the full Unix operating system (this was in 1980 according to Kevin Brunt). This was an extremely popular machine used by many University departments to support their use of Unix.

We then purchased an additional PDP-11/44 to provide a full Unix service for our users.

I cannot remember when the PDP-11 machines were phased out and replaced by a collection of Sun boxes running their version of Unix, Solaris.